



RIVERS TO RIDGES KNIFE USE PROTOCOL

Knife teachings will be guided by the [8 Blades Teachings](#) and [Woodcarving with Knives: Stances](#) from Trackers Earth.

a) All participants will be explicitly taught proper techniques and safe knife handling procedures including:

1. carving AWAY from yourself, not towards (always being aware of inner and outer blood circles)
2. taking a safe stance (standing with feet shoulder width apart and slightly bent knees OR a high kneeling position)
3. never carving onto your lap
4. applying light pressure and taking off small bits at a time
5. never running with a knife
6. never pointing the tip at someone
7. keeping the tip pointed down while walking with a knife
8. always passing a knife with the handle pointed toward the recipient
9. only using a knife for its intended purpose (do not use to pry, etc.)
10. when sheathed, always holding the sheath near the end, *not* at the top where the blade comes out, and keeping your hand away from the top of the sheath where the knife exits. Using your fingertips to pinch the flat part, *never* wrapping your hand around the edge (or stitching) of the sheath
11. always keeping knives sheathed and off the ground when not in use

b) Participants must meet the following requirements prior to handling knife:

1. Demonstrate the motion to be used when removing a knife from sheath
2. Demonstrate the technique and position used when carving
3. Prove a sense of responsibility as decided on by leaders
4. Pass a verbal test to indicate competency and safe handling practices

c) Knives are in possession of the leaders at all times, unless under supervised use.

d) To use knives, participants must be 9 years of age or older.

e) All leaders will receive training, be able to show proper knife use and explain safe use practices to children.

f) All knives must be sharpened and inspected regularly by leaders.

g) All knives will be stored in their sheaths when not in use.

h) All knives used during programs will have been previously approved by staff (i.e. participants are not permitted to use their own knives (due to risks of folding blades, serrated edges, dull knives, etc.).

i) There is a zero tolerance policy for unsafe use or suggested use of a knife (i.e. if a child intentionally uses a knife in an unsafe manner, or implies that they will do so, they are no longer allowed to use knives for the duration of the program day. Leaders may decide to retest the student, or re-allow knife use after the participant has adequately demonstrated their responsibility).

The following images and text are quoted directly from the [Trackers Earth article "The 8 Blades"](#).

Safety The 4 Cardinal Blades

The Cardinal Blades (East, South, West, and North) are important practices for safety and competency.



East Blade **PAY ATTENTION**

With every cut imagine any potential path your blade might take—be willing to shape and reshape your position and plans to assure complete safety. Stay alert. Injuries happen when you stop Paying Attention. Avoid carving when tired. Don't look away or get distracted, always keep your awareness on the cut. This extends beyond what you see—use all your senses to feel and hear the knife moving through the wood.

South Blade **GUARD: OUTER BLOOD CIRCLE**

Your Outer Blood Circle is a safety zone you guard whenever using a blade. Imagine circles as wide as you can reach with your sheathed blade—up above and all sides. Don't let anyone step into your Outer Blood Circle in case you slip while carving. If someone steps into your Blood Circle, immediately stop using your blade and sheath it if necessary.

West Blade **CONSIDER THE FORCE**

More force in a cut often leads to less control—especially for beginners. The less control you have, the greater the risk of injury. The value of self-control is a Ranger's first lesson in flowing with nature. When using blades, consider how much control each technique gives you. As you get better with a blade you achieve a balance—optimizing both control and force.

North Blade **GUARD: INNER BLOOD CIRCLE**

Consider your Inner Blood Circle. In addition to watching out for others while you carve, take care with your own body. Your body is filled with blood—cutting into your flesh will cause you to spill red wet, sticky stuff all over the place. Remember to imagine any potential path of the blade—keeping your body, hands and fingers well out of the way of any cut.